

# The Fanfic Panel Discussion

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Summary: The dragon-riders attend a convention of fanfic writers and try to answer all their questions. The results will be funny, surprising, touching, and a lot of other things. Rated T for adult themes; the language is all K.

## 1. Chapter 1

### **\*\*Panel Discussion\*\* Chapter 1**

A/N \_The dragon-riders attend a convention of fanfic writers. The results will be funny, surprising, touching, and a lot of other things. Rated T for adult themes; the language is all K.\_

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The First Annual How-To-Train-Your-Dragon Fanfic Convention was going wonderfully. Nearly a hundred budding authors (and the parents of the younger ones) had gathered in the fancy motel's convention area, along with several hundred avid fanfic readers who hoped to meet their favorite authors in person, and a handful of misguided bronies and pegasisters who didn't realize \_their\_ convention was \_next\_ week. The buzz of conversation was broken every few minutes by a shriek of "Oh, it's \_you!\_" from someone who recognized a user-name on someone's "Hi, my name is \_" sticker.

Over in the Vendors' Hall, an astonishing variety of plotbunnies were being sold or given away by authors who couldn't give them a good home. They were also selling print-outs of digital pictures, autographed manuscripts, and hand-made plushies of Toothless. There was a Room of Sadness, where distraught readers could console each other over the fact that stories like "I Hear Him Scream" or "Crash Courses in Marriage" would probably never be finished. In the LARP area, five Hiccups, three Astrids, and one each of Ruffnut and Tuffnut took turns acting out their favorite scenes from the movie and the CN series. The Astrid-whacks-Hiccup-in-the-arm scene was especially popular.

A female voice came over the PA system. "Ladies, if I could have..." The sound system fed back with an earsplitting squeal, and someone fiddled with some knobs. "Ladies, if I could have your attention, please. We will now... oh, I'm sorry. Ladies and gentlemen â€" I guess we do have a few of those â€" if I could have your attention please, we will now have the highlight of our convention, a panel discussion featuring some of our favorite people. Will you please welcome... \_the dragon riders of Berk!\_"

To a blast of orchestral brass and skirling warpipes (better known as the "Test Drive" music), Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III made his way to the second chair at a row of folding tables, audibly squeaking with every other step. The crowd cheered and shouted hysterically, mingled with some shrieks of "Oh, he's so CUUUTE!" He seemed very embarrassed by all the attention.

The music faded out and was replaced by the swelling strains of the "Romantic Flight" music. That was Astrid Hofferson's cue to stride into the convention hall, to many cheers and much applause. A security guard at the door tried to take her axe away; she indignantly snatched it back and marched to her seat on Hiccup's left.

Now the music faded to the "This Is Berk" theme. Fishlegs Ingerman tried to be innocuous as he crept to his seat next to Astrid. Whoever had set up the chairs didn't have a big person in mind, and he had to walk sideways to avoid hitting the wall, which didn't help him stay innocuous.

At this point, the music stopped. The female voice came back on. "Uhh... are you \_sure\_ this is the music you want me to play?"

"They told me I could pick any music I wanted!" a brash male voice shot back from just outside the hall.

"Okay..." To the brassy march called "Hail to the Chief," Snotlout Jorgenson strolled casually to his seat, blowing kisses to his fans, of whom there weren't nearly as many as he seemed to think.

When he was seated, the music shifted to the delicate strains of "Vikings Take Their Tea." The Thorston twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut, stepped into the hall... and stopped dead. "Hey!" Tuff shouted. "What \_is\_ this? How come we don't get cool music like the others?"

The music stopped. The female voice returned. "We thought this would be appropriate for your sister."

"Well, you thought wrong!" Ruff shouted in no particular direction. "I like cool music, too! What do you think we are â€" a couple of idiots?"

"No comment," the voice replied. After a moment, the sound system played the "Dragon Battle" music, the twins nodded and high-fived each other, and they took their seats at the far end of the table. The first seat was taken by one of the convention organizers, who clutched a wireless microphone.

"Thank you for coming, all of you, and welcome," she began. "I know that all of our guests have a lot of questions for our panel, so

we'll get started right away. As we agreed, each of our panelists will read a few prepared remarks, and then we'll take questions from the floor." She passed the mic to Hiccup, who stood and addressed the group, somewhat nervously.

"Hi, all of you," he said. "It's great to see that we have so many fans, especially the kind who love us so much that they like to whump us, hand us over to the Outcasts, and turn us into dragons." A few laughs rippled across the auditorium. "Seriously, the whole fan-fiction thing is an amazing way for people to show their loyalty to a realm that they can identify with, and even forge a kind of personal connection with it."

"\_Forge!\_ Ha ha! I see what you did there!" Fishlegs called. Hiccup shook his head and went on.

"We really appreciate all the work you fanfic authors put into your stories, knowing that the only reward you can hope for is a few 'favorites and follows' on a web site. It amazes us, the thought and creativity that some of you put into your work. The only down side is that a few of you don't put as much thought or creativity into your work as others, and that leads me to my one big complaint with the whole fanfic thing.

"Me and Toothless are never going to get intimate, okay? It doesn't matter if you turn him into a human, or if you turn me into a dragon, or if you switch our genders, or whatever creepy stuff you come up with â€" why can't you people accept the idea that two people, or two beings, can have a passionate, powerful love bond between them without having to express it physically? Besides, I really like girls, not â€" OW!" Astrid had just belted him in the arm. "Rephrase. I really like one girl, not guys, and definitely not dragons! I mean, with all the amazing things we can do with dragons, why is boinking them so high on your lists of things for me to do? I just don't get it.

"Anyway, I had to get that out of my system, but it's really neat to see all of you here, whether I agree with your story ideas or not. You're a great bunch of fans, and... well, if it wasn't for you, I might not even be here." The crowd applauded loudly. He passed the mic to Astrid. She pulled out a sheet of paper and began reading from it.

"Thank you. I am also glad to be here and see all of you. It gives me a thrill every time I see myself in one of your stories, because it shows that you care about me. I especially like the stories that show my softer, feminine side, because I..." She stopped and glared at the moderator. "Who wrote this? I can't say this! It's not true!"

The moderator looked embarrassed. "We thought it would be good for your image if you didn't come across as a girl with anger issues who abuses her boyfriend all the time."

Astrid crumpled up the paper and threw it over her shoulder. "You know something? It took some serious anger to get where I am today! If I didn't have an angry side, there goes half your movie, right? Would that romantic flight be so interesting if it was Barbie, or Dora the Explorer, riding behind Hiccup? Not much! Yes, I'm a girl, and yes, I do have feelings, but the thing that defines me isn't my skill at flower arranging, is it? It's my temper, and my ability to

control it when I think it needs controlling. I do have anger issues, and I'm not going to resolve them, because I'd be totally boring if I did! Would you want that, Hiccup?"

"Yes! I mean no!" he exclaimed.

"Right!" she went on. "So if you fanfic authors are going to write about Astrid, don't you dare make me into some kind of Viking Stepford-wife, okay? I'm going to make this guy an awesome wife some day, if he's lucky, but he's going to have bruises on his arms until his dying day, and don't any of you ever forget it!" The crowd went wild.

Now it was Fishlegs' turn with the microphone. "Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, I'll keep this short. You guys are awesome. You take time and effort to make stories about people like me who, technically, aren't even real, and you make us come alive, both in your own imaginations and in the minds of the people who read your stories. The creative people at Dreamworks took some rough ideas and turned them into six well-rounded, interesting characters, and most of you have taken us and run with us in ways that Bonnie and Chris and Dean, and even Saint Cressida herself, never dreamed of.

"So how come some of you treat us like two-dimensional animated characters from a cartoon movie? Sure, you do a good job with the Big Two here, but what about the rest of us?" His eyes began to fill up. "We have feelings! We have passions! Take me, for example! Can I be more than just a walking encyclopedia for Hiccup to call on when he needs an obscure fact? Am I good for more than just a second-rate love interest for Ruffnut because she can't get Hiccup? Could I ever make an important discovery, or save someone's life, or kiss a hot OC babe with violet eyes?"

"Legs, I think that's enough," said Snotlout, who was acting embarrassed.

"And what about my dear, sweet Meatlug?" Fishlegs went on, tears streaming down his cheeks. "Some of you treat her like the Tuffnut of the dragon group!" ("I resent that!" Tuff called.) "She has emotions, just like a human. She nuzzles and nurtures her young babies with motherly affection. She and I share a bond that goes deeper than most of you imagine, even though your imaginations are so good in other ways! She... she..." He handed the microphone to Snotlout and sat down, weeping.

"Well, that was different," Snotlout began. "I want to thank all of you for coming out to see me, even though very few of you give me much time in your stories. I mean, seriously, you guys are inventing smart, talented, beautiful OC girls all the time, and who do they always fall for? Hiccup, Hiccup, and Hiccup! By sheer random chance, one of them ought to fall for me now and then, shouldn't they? Even if I wasn't awesome, there ought to be a one in four chance that, when a mysterious girl falls out of the sky or gets found in the forest, she ought to think I'm the guy, right? And don't even get me started on me and my Astrid! What's with you people? How come I never get the girl? I'm Snotlout! I'm the greatest! I'm â€œ"

The moderator made a throat-cutting gesture, and the microphone went dead. Snotlout disgustedly tapped it with his finger a few times, muttered, "This thing is busted," and handed it to Tuffnut.

"Thank you all," he began, reading from hand-written notes. "As the others have said, it's because of you that we're here, and we are all grateful for the chance to give something back to the fanfic community. The sheer number of stories you've written is evidence, not only that we are awesome, but that you are as well. I mean, there are more chapters about us than about Big Bang Theory!" The crowd cheered.

"Like the others, I have one personal issue I'd like to air out," he continued, "and that's the fact that somebody, somewhere, chose me to be the comic relief in this group. For some reason, that means I have to act stupid. Okay, it's a challenge to my abilities as an actor, but it's getting tired, okay? Would it be the death of you if somebody let me be good at something, just for a change?

"I mean, think about that other animated feature with six main characters that I won't mention." He mumbled, "My Little Pony," then resumed talking normally. "Do they need comic relief to be successful? Hardly! And when they did add a comic-relief character who was, shall we say, sub-optimal in the smarts department, the politically-correct crowd went insane and demanded that the show make her look and act more normal!

"Now, I'm a professional, and I know the difference between playing a role and living in real life. But this kind of unfairness just can't go on. So, from now on, I am going to make Derpy eyes until I get the respect I deserve." He passed the microphone to his sister and turned one of his eyes upward, while the other stayed normal.

Hiccup shook his head and murmured to Astrid, "That's just disturbing."

"That'll get him respect for sure," Snotlout commented to Fishlegs.

"Thanks, bro." Ruffnut stood and straightened her helmet. "Conventions like this are an awesome chance for... Tuff, could you quit it with the eyes? You're creeping me out!"

"Not until I get some respect," he shot back. "Derp!"

She tried to look away from him. "Well, anyway, these conventions are great for the fans to meet each other and share ideas. It's not just fanfics, either. There's fan art, there's cosplay, there's making dolls and plushies, there's all kinds of ways for you to get involved in our universe." She dropped her voice to a whisper. "I like that." She got the laughs and applause that she hoped for. She continued.

"Now, I don't want to sound like a complainer, but... well, okay, maybe I am. But I'm a girl, and I have feelings, and some of you guys are just mean! I mean, think about it! When Astrid grabs Hiccup and forces him to kiss her, everybody is all, 'Oh, isn't that romantic!' But if I put some moves on him, everybody is all, 'Date rape! Date rape!' "

"And when, exactly, did you put some moves on Hiccup?" Astrid demanded.

"I \_didn't,\_ " Ruff answered, "but if you look me up on deviantart, they make it look like I'm trying to jump his bones every time he takes a breath. And he never likes it! You'd think the only way I could ever get a guy is to club him on the head and drag him off by the hair. I mean, I know I'm not a swimsuit model or anything, even though some of you draw me that way, but with the guys in Berk outnumbering the girls by two to one, you'd think \_somebody\_ would like it if I smiled at him!" She swept her arm in a gesture that took in the entire audience. "Tell me, do you think that's fair?"

Calls and mutters of "no" could be heard all over the room.

"Then what are you fanfic authors going to do about it?" she demanded.

A college-age girl stood up. "I'm going to write a story about you and Hiccup, as soon as I get home! A \_good\_ story, with a lime at the end!"

"Oh, you \_think\_ so, do you?" Astrid snarled as she jumped to her feet, axe at the ready. "\_I\_ might have a thing or two to say about that!"

"Meow," Snotlout murmured to Tuffnut.

The moderator reached desperately for the microphone. "This has been very interesting, I'm sure, but we do need to move on to the question-and-answer period. Please don't shout out your questions until I call on you. We'll get to as many of you as we can for the rest of this hour. Yes, young lady in the front?"

A teen-age girl in a hoodie stood up. "I think I speak for everyone when I ask, where's Toothless?" Many people nodded and murmured in agreement. The moderator gave Hiccup the mic.

"We tried to bring Toothless here, and he really wanted to come. But we couldn't get permission from the fire marshal. He said there's some rule in the building code about dragons and people being in the same building. The convention would have had to take out an extra fire-insurance policy, and they just couldn't afford it this year. Maybe next year."

"Thank you, Hiccup," the moderator smiled. "Does anyone else have a question for our panel?"

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A/N: \_Reviewers\_ " if you send me some questions that you'd like the panel to answer, not only might your suggestion wind up in the story; you'll make it easier for me to write another chapter, which means more stuff for you to read. I'm looking for the kinds of questions that modern people would ask the teens if they could, preferably emotionally-charged questions. For example, the first question in the next chapter will be, "Hiccup, when are you going to propose to Astrid?"\_

## 2. Chapter 2

\*\*Panel Discussion\*\* Chapter 2

A teen girl three rows back raised her hand. "Hiccup, when are you going to propose to Astrid?"

"Uhhh... uhhh... I, uhhh..."

"I'll handle this," Astrid snapped, and snatched the microphone away from him. He took a deep drink of water from the flagon with the dragon, and waited nervously to hear what she'd say.

"The first thing you have to realize," she began, "is that it's not his job to propose. Viking marriages were all arranged by the parents, and love almost never had anything to do with it. It was all about making strong ties between families and tribes. That would be especially true in his case, because he's a chief's son and a future chief. His marriage is going to be all politics and no passion, officially at least."

"That's not very romantic," complained the girl.

"Nobody ever said it was supposed to be romantic!" Astrid shot back. "We Vikings could have very loving marriages, but the love came after the wedding, not before. You're just projecting your own culture onto us, and trying to make us act the way you'd act if you were here. That's totally unrealistic."

Tuffnut snorted. "Wait a second here, Astrid. Let me get this straight. We're a bunch of Viking teen-agers who ride dragons, we speak American English and our parents speak with Scottish accents, and you're complaining about our courtships being unrealistic?"

"But it's so easy to get those things right!" she retorted. "Honestly, have you people never heard of Google? Just look up the Viking Answer Lady. She did a pretty good job of reconstructing our culture, considering we didn't leave her much to work with. She wrote a huge chapter on courtships and marriage."

"Look stuff up on-line?" Snotlout burst out. "Why not just marry the girls that the sites tell you stuff about?"

"Getting back to the question," Astrid went on, "there's no reason to make us have a 21st-century American courtship. Some of you did do your homework, and you've made some very romantic stories about us without making us break our own traditions. A couple of you even gave me some ideas." She patted Hiccup on the head; he blushed crimson. "The trouble is that some of you don't want to do your homework; you just want us to act out your own romantic wish fulfillment. I'll tell you honestly, I've got my own agenda for this young man, and it doesn't involve going on dates together or buying diamond rings, and it definitely doesn't involve breaking our Viking moral code, the way so many of you want us to do." Hiccup was trying to hide his face in his hands; the crowd was beginning to laugh nervously.

"Okay, I'll rephrase," said the girl in the audience. "Hiccup, when is your father going to arrange a marriage for you and Astrid?"

"Oh, gods, please let this end soon," Hiccup moaned quietly.

"It better be soon, or I'm going to start breaking people's

fingers," Astrid answered with a smile. "I'm almost sixteen. By Viking standards, I'm an old maid." That brought a nervous chuckle to the entire audience. The girl who asked the question nodded and sat down.

"Next question," the moderator said. "Yes, you over on the left?"

"This is kind of a silly question," said the young man. "The big hall in your village â€" is it called the Great Hall, or the Mead Hall?"

"Can I answer that?" Fishlegs asked; the moderator passed him the microphone. "All our sagas and runestones call the biggest hall in the village the Mead Hall. But, in 'Gift of the Night Fury' and some of the CN cartoons, Stoick calls it the Great Hall. You authors can decide which name you like better. If you want to be historical, it's the Mead Hall; if you want to be on Stoick's side, it's the Great Hall. Whatever you call it, they serve good chicken there. Low armor class, and a Juicy factor of 10."

The moderator nodded to a young girl with purple hair. "This is another question for Hiccup. What is Stoick the Vast really like as a father?"

Hiccup heaved a huge sigh of relief once he'd heard the question. "Honestly, I think my dad is one of the most misunderstood characters in the movie.

"Is he a great father? No, he isn't, but that's not because he wants to be a bad dad or anything. He just doesn't know how to be a good dad. Remember that scene late at night in my room at the forge, when he gave me the helmet? He desperately wanted that little talk to go well! But neither one of us knew how to talk to each other. I'd like it if you authors would remember that. My dad is not a villain.

"I read one story where he wanted to put me to death for using the chin-rub trick on a dragon in the ring. For real? We Vikings are very family-oriented. Even if that was a capital offense, he'd never do it himself. I read that story and thought, 'Whose father is this? He isn't my dad.'

"Then there was one where Astrid and I... well, we... we did something we weren't supposed to do until we were married, and she got... well, when my dad found out about it, he laughed and celebrated because it showed what a man I was. That was totally embarrassing." ("You're telling me?" Astrid muttered.) "A real Viking father would have been ashamed of a son who did that. Not to mention, her family really would have killed me.

"So, people, if you're going to write about Stoick, please remember â€" my dad is a lot like most other people's dads. He's doing the best he can, and he's learning. It's not like he's abusive or anything."

"That time he pushed you down in the Great Hall â€" wasn't that abusive?" someone asked out loud.

Hiccup wrung his hands. "Well... yeah, it was. But he learned from



that experience, and I can tell it's never going to happen again. That's the mark of a good story â€" the characters learn and grow from what they've been through. My dad still isn't perfect, but he's better than he used to be. I can live with that. I hope that's true of all of us." A few people applauded.

One of the mothers of the younger children raised her hand. "I'm a little concerned about some of the stories my daughter has been writing, and I'd like to ask a question for the whole panel. How do you feel about lemons in these stories about you?"

The moderator looked stricken. "Uhh... uhh... we've got all ages here. We have to keep this kid-friendly, okay?"

"That's a sore subject, but I think we all have something to say about it," Ruffnut said. Hiccup and Astrid both cringed and hid their faces in their hands. The moderator hesitantly passed the microphone down to Ruff.

"Just speaking for me, the whole idea is creepy," she began. "I mean, you're describing every little detail of what I look like without my... I mean, how do you know this stuff? Are you peeking in my window at night or something? Honestly, some of you make me feel like you're stalking me. I'm not okay with it. And if you skipped all the femslash, it would make my day."

She passed the mic to Tuff. "Me, I'm a normal healthy teen-age kind of guy, and I don't mind getting jiggy with somebody now and then. In fact, there have been a couple of girls lately â€"

"Liar!" snarled Ruff.

"Braggart!" muttered Snotlout.

"Pig!" growled Astrid.

"Really?" marveled Fishlegs.

"Anyway," he went on, "my problem with most of you authors is, the only ones you ever hook me up with are Hiccup and my own sister." (Everyone on the panel went "Ewww!" and leaned away from him, except for Snotlout, who looked intrigued.) "I mean, why Hiccup? If I did swing that way, why wouldn't I pick a manly hunk of beefcake like Snotlout?" (Now it was Lout's turn to say "Ewww!" and lean away.) "And don't even get me started on Ruff, okay â€" that's just sick. Come on, people! Isn't that what original characters are for?"

It was Snotlout's turn. "I'm going to surprise you, and agree with Tuffnut. You authors are great at making up OC's with haunting eyes and beautiful faces and ruby-red lips and huge â€"

"â€" tracts of land," Tuff leaned over and said, drowning out whatever Lout was trying to say.

"Anyway," Lout continued, "if an OC girl gets a little too friendly with me, what's wrong with that? You sure won't hear me complain! It would sure be better than the action you do give me, that's for sure, because it's almost all that 'yaoi' stuff. I know there aren't enough girls to go around, but still, the whole 'slash' thing just doesn't add up. Why is it such a big deal to so many people?"

"I have a theory about that," Fishlegs said. ("Ohh, here we go," Snotlout sighed.) "I think a lot of girls are grossed out at the idea of two girls together, but they're curious about two guys. A lot of guys are the opposite â€" they don't like the idea of two guys, but they're intrigued at the thought of two girls. Most fanfic writers are girls, so we get more slash than femslash. The het stuff... that, I can't explain."

"I think that stuff is mostly guys writing smut to amuse themselves," Astrid said acidly. "They know next to nothing about how girls really feel, especially the first time. They're not even close."

"Are you saying you know what it's like the first time?" Snotlout leered.

"I'm saying we girls talk to each other, and we tell each other what matters," Astrid shot back. "Unlike you guys, who just burp, insult each other, and curse the officials at sporting events."

"Astrid, is that fair?" Hiccup demanded.

"Okay, most of you guys," she said. "Anyway, to me, the whole 'lemon' thing is just wrong. Maybe it's because you authors keep shoving me into the middle of that kind of action, when a real Viking girl wouldn't dare do stuff like that before she was married. I mean, that's not what we're about! I know it's not what I'm about! And if it was, I sure wouldn't want the whole fanfic universe to read a play-by-play description of it! I'm with Ruff on this one â€" it's a privacy thing."

"And on a related note, the preggers-before-marriage thing... you make it seem like it's no big deal, like it's almost expected of us. Maybe that's normal for you, but not to us Vikings. I think I've had more babies before marriage, thanks to your fanfics, than I'll ever have after marriage. Call me old-fashioned, but there's something wrong with that."

"It could be worse," Fishlegs interjected. "What about all those stories where Toothless gets Hiccup preggers?"

"Please don't remind me," moaned Hiccup. "Oh, why didn't I stay in bed this morning?"

"Hey, I've got an idea!" Ruff shouted. "Maybe we should start writing stories about you authors! Yeah! I'll start with a little femslash about you and you â€" she pointed at two teen girls at random, who both blushed and tried to hide behind the people sitting in front of them. "Oh, you don't like it so much when it's about you, huh? Think about that the next time you start undressing me with your words, thank you very much."

"Well, this has been very interesting," stammered the moderator, who had turned quite red, "but let's â€" "

"Wait, we haven't heard from Hiccup!" Snotlout exclaimed, and handed him the mic.

"If you value your life, watch what you say," Astrid hissed.

"Uhhh..." Hiccup was also going very red in the face. "You authors seem to give me a lot more of that kind of action than anybody else. I suppose I ought to be flattered, even though a lot of those stories don't sound like me at all. You portray me as some kind of irresistible love god, with the anatomy to match."

"There's a reason they call it fan \_fiction!\_" Tuffnut smirked. Snotlout snorted and gave him a high-five.

"Outside of the sheer improbability of all that... I don't know, I just thought that kind of stuff was supposed to be personal," he went on. "I mean, take that infamous scene, the public consummation of the marriage â€" maybe the Vikings really did that and maybe we didn't â€" but put \_yourself\_ in the middle of that action. Would you like it? Probably not. So why do you think Astrid and I like it when you put \_us\_ on public display?"

"I'd \_really\_ appreciate it if you left me out of this," Astrid said quietly. Now she was starting to go red.

"If I leave \_you\_ out of it, that doesn't leave \_me\_ much except the other guys and Toothless," Hiccup replied, "and that's where \_I'd\_ like to bow out altogether. All you authors, maybe you could try that 'do unto others' thing, and leave our private lives out of your stories? I mean, if you can't tell a story without going NC-17 on us, is the story worth telling?"

"Some of us think it is," someone in the audience said.

"Then do a self-insertion, and create an OC of the opposite sex, and have a party with each other!" Hiccup demanded. "None of us has any problem with that, except maybe Snotlout, and that's because he's envious. Just speaking for me, I don't like that stuff."

"You like it just fine in the stories," Ruff called. Most of the audience laughed quietly.

"Well, they asked my opinion. To me, 'yaoi' is a Japanese word, and I don't speak Japanese; 'slash' is what a dragon does with its claws; and a lemon is a fruit tree that \_does not grow in Berk,\_ okay? Me and Astrid will do our thing \_our\_ way, when \_we\_ want, not when \_you\_ tell us to, and... uhh..." He realized that Astrid was glaring at him angrily. "...can we move on to the next question?"

The moderator pointed to someone in the middle of the audience. "Hiccup, what's the real story about you and Heather?"

"Oh, gods! Can we go back to the previous question?"

"No, Hiccup," Astrid purred. "I think \_everyone\_ is entitled to hear an honest answer to that one."

"Well, uhh, the simple truth is... I was an idiot. Completely and totally, no excuses offered. I fell for a damsel in distress with a pretty face, I ignored everything Astrid tried to tell me, and it was pretty much one of the worst times of my life. Even if Heather hadn't been working for the Outcasts, it still would have been totally stupid of me."

He glanced at Astrid, who nodded and said, "Go on."

"Go on? What else am I supposed to say?"

"Say more about how I was right and you were wrong," she suggested. "I love that stuff."

"Come on, Astrid," Ruff interjected. "He apologized before, he's groveling already, and all the guys made the same mistake. You ought to be mad at her a little, shouldn't you? After all, she told the lies, not him."

Astrid whacked Fishlegs in the arm and told him, "Pass that down to Ruff." He looked at Snotlout and Tuffnut, got up from the table, sidestepped down to where Ruff was sitting, and poked her in the arm with his chubby finger. "That's from Astrid," he explained lamely, and returned to his seat, acutely aware that everyone was staring at him.

"Well, I think we've beaten that one into the ground," the moderator said, trying to change the subject.

"But she hasn't beaten him into the ground yet!" Snotlout objected.

"Actually, she did, but nobody else was around to see it," Hiccup quavered. "She didn't think it was anybody else's business how we settled it..." â€" he half-smiled â€" "...or how we made up afterwards." Cheers and woo-hoos met that remark. Astrid tried to belt him in the arm, but misjudged the distance and barely tapped him.

"I think I see a hand raised in the far corner," the moderator cut in, thankful for the distraction. "Yes, what is your question?"

**\*\*O\*\***

A/N: Reviewers â€" if you send me some questions that you'd like the panel to answer, not only will your suggestion wind up in the story; you'll make it easier for me to write another chapter, which means more stuff for you to read. I'm looking for the kinds of questions that modern people would ask the teens if they could, preferably emotionally-charged questions. For example, the first question in the next chapter will be, "Ruffnut, how do you feel about being paired off with Fishlegs?"\_

### 3. Chapter 3

**\*\*Panel Discussion\*\*** Chapter 3

A/N Thank you to Alu in Chains, Kumiho-Kitsune, johnnylee619, and Megadracosaurus, whose questions got used in this chapter. To the others who suggested questions, wait patiently â€" there will be more chapters.\_

**\*\*O\*\***

"I'd like to ask Ruffnut a question. It seems like most of us have

settled on Fishlegs as your eventual husband, and I'd like to know how you feel about that." Several other people nodded throughout the auditorium. The teens passed the microphone down; Fishlegs released it with some reluctance.

"How do I feel about that," she began. "I guess I should start by thanking you for caring about me enough that you're playing matchmaker for me." That got a few smiles and quiet chuckles. "Honestly? I like Fishlegs; he's a nice guy. But pairing me with him is just about the biggest OOC move you could throw at me.

"Look at me! Look how my brother and I treat each other! That's the kind of life I love, and Fishlegs could never lower himself to do that. Can you imagine him hitting me in the head to snap me out of it when I'm feeling down? I'm not cut out for a nice guy. I need a living roller-coaster who will take me along for the ride!"

"You need a guy like me!" Snotlout cut in.

"Actually, you're closer to the mark, but you're still too boring," she shot back; he visibly wilted. She turned back to the audience. "A few of you have paired me with Snotlout, and, well, I guess I could do worse. But with all the imagination you guys have shown, who do you limit yourselves to just the same handful of characters when it comes to my love life? My brother isn't the only one who'd be better off with an OC from another island!"

"But that puts us in a bind," said the girl who asked the question. "A lot of people don't like to read about OC's."

"Okay, what's most important?" Ruff challenged her. "Running up your count of favorites and follows, or treating us fairly?"

"To us, what's most important is to tell a good story," the girl answered. "It's a challenge to find someone who would be a good match for you. As an author, it's a lot more satisfying to find a plausible way to pair you off with one of those guys than to pull a deus ex machina and create the perfect man with a few keystrokes." People were nodding all over the room.

"Oh!" Ruff exclaimed, feigning shock. "You mean you could create the perfect man for me, but you don't want to, for the sake of your own ego?"

A girl in the front row opened her laptop and began typing on it. "Of course we could. Watch this," she said as she typed. A blurry form began to take shape in front of her. It began to look human-shaped; then it became recognizably male; clothing, hair, and other details began to emerge. In about three minutes, she was done typing, and he stirred.

He was a good-looking young man with tousled black hair and a rakish expression. His clothing was nice but not extravagant. He glanced along the panel of teens until his eyes fell on Ruffnut. He strode over to her, leaned on the table in front of her, and softly said, "Hey, good-looking. How about you and me finding some nice long sharp poles, so we can go jousting with our dragons?"

Ruff's face lit up. "Jousting in mid-air? Where do I sign up?!"

He extended his hand to her. As she reached to take it, the girl with the laptop stabbed a few keys and shouted, "Select all! Delete!" The handsome young man vanished into thin air.

Ruff's hand clasped nothing, her face fell, and she slumped back in her chair. People in the audience began to boo. The girl with the laptop tried to say something, but the others drowned her out. After a few seconds, she began to cry and rushed out of the auditorium.

"I know a thing or two about being mean, and that might have been the meanest thing I've ever seen," Tuffnut exclaimed as he stood up. He was so upset, he forgot to keep his Derpy expression. "I've read your stories, and I know most of you aren't like that, but that was really cruel." He called to the door where the girl had run out, "You don't ever mess with my sister again like that, even if it is just a story!" He turned to Ruff. "I like the part about the jousting in mid-air, though. We'll try that when we get home."

"It wouldn't be the same," she mumbled.

"I think it's time to change the subject," the moderator said. "Yes, over there?"

A small girl asked, "Hiccup, which tasted worse â€" the fish that Toothless gave you, or the yak-nog that Astrid gave you?"

"That's an easy one!" Hiccup exclaimed. "The fish tasted worse, because Toothless isn't here to hit me. OWW!"

"That's for making fun of my kitchen skills," Astrid half-snarled, half-smiled.

"But yaks don't even live in the Northland!" Hiccup yelled. "They live in central Asia! We Vikings get our milk from cows, just like everybody else in Europe."

"If they're not going to let me bring realism into it, then you're not going realistic on me, either," she stated with finality. She turned to the audience. "Next question, please."

"I've got a question," a college-age boy said. "Hiccup, the promo pictures for your next movie show you holding a flaming sword in your right hand. I thought you were left-handed. What's up with that?"

"Oh, that," Hiccup laughed. "I was just having an Inigo Montoya moment for the camera. By the way, thanks for the easy questions. I was almost starting to regret coming to this convention. I don't mind your curiosity, but some of the things you're curious about... well, thanks for the easy ones."

The moderator called on another high-school girl. "I hope this isn't a bad question, to ask, but... Hiccup, how do you feel when you read our stories about your childhood, and how awful it was?"

"Well, it... oh, gods... so much for easy questions... how can I say this?" He sounded flustered. "You know how you're supposed to put a trigger warning on a story if it has dark stuff that might give someone flashbacks? Sometimes I wish there was a trigger warning on those stories about me when I was younger. If you haven't gone

through endless bullying and abuse and neglect, you don't realize the emotional scars it leaves..." He was beginning to break down. "I try not to be bitter about it, but... all I wanted was to be liked and accepted... no different from anybody else... and for \_years\_... for \_years\_..." He hid his face in his hands and couldn't go on.

"I'd like to add something to that," Astrid said, deceptively calmly, as she stood and took the microphone. "Some of you authors just allude to the things he went through. Some of you make up new horrors for him to endure in the past, and sometimes even in the present. But in every case, the ones to blame aren't the authors." She glared at the other four teens. "\_You're\_ the ones who did the bullying!"

"Are you completely innocent, Astrid?" someone called from near the back of the audience.

"I just stood there and let them do it, so I'm just as guilty," she answered. "I've apologized to him for that, though."

"Did you hit him first, as usual?" Tuffnut called out.

"\_Shut up,\_ " she hissed through gritted teeth. "You guys are the \_real\_ guilty ones! You're the ones who made his life a living hell for eight years!"

"I think the whole village kind of joined in â€" it wasn't just us," Snotlout quavered.

"If we hadn't, then the story wouldn't have turned out the way it did, would it?" Ruff demanded.

"Just because something good came out of it, that doesn't make it right," Astrid shot back. "The ones who beat him, the ones who mocked him, the ones who shunned him, even the ones who knew the others were wrong, but didn't have the courage to stand up to them... \_you're\_ the ones to blame for what he went through!" She tapped the corner of the table where she was standing. "The line to apologize forms here."

She continued to glare at the other four teens. They refused to move.

But, to her everlasting amazement, a handful of the fanfic authors stood awkwardly and shuffled over to the table where Hiccup sat, still hiding his face.

"No â€" I didn't mean you!" she protested. "Like I said, you were just telling stories! You never laid a finger on him!"

"Astrid, I really feel like I have to do this," said the first one sadly. "Hiccup, I was just telling stories, like she said, but I never stopped to think how they'd make you feel. I didn't mean to be cruel. I'm sorry."

He raised his head, blinked his eyes dry, and held her hand with both of his. "I... I forgive you," he stammered. "Thank you." The others apologized with similar words when it was their turn.

As they returned to their seats, it was Astrid who was blinking back tears. "You really \_care\_ about us! We aren't just characters in your

stories! You really \_care!\_" She turned away so the audience couldn't see her. "Darn you all, you made me cry!"

**\*\*O\*\***

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#### 4. Chapter 4

**\*\*Panel Discussion\*\* Chapter 4**

A/N \_Thank you to LesserWraith, HavenFan1, Ferdoos, cute polar bear, and Alu in Chains, whose questions got used in this chapter. To the others who suggested questions, wait patiently â€" there will be more chapters. Keep those questions coming!\_

**\*\*O\*\***

The moderator called on someone else. "Aside from Stoick and Spitelout, where are all your parents?"

The teens all looked at each other, puzzled. Astrid dried her eyes and asked, "Ruff, wasn't it your day to keep an eye on our parents?"

"That was last week," she said. "I thought it was Snotlout's turn to watch them."

"You guys gave me the week off," he answered. "I put in all that work to net them and tie them up and drag them back after they got away last time, remember? It was Tuff's turn to watch them yesterday, and I've got them starting on Monday." Everyone peered at Fishlegs.

"Guys, I swear, their cage was locked after I fed them this morning!" Legs sputtered. "If they got away again, I don't how they... how they..." He snorted and broke up laughing, as did all the others.

"I warned you guys, we had to practice this scene more!" exclaimed Astrid, who was laughing as hard as any of them. "We all \_knew\_ they were going to ask that question, and if we couldn't keep a straight face when we answered..." She waited until they'd all regained their composure.

"Seriously," Snotlout began.

"Yeah, right," Tuff cut in.

"No, the complete absence of our parents is our gift to you, the fan fiction authors," Lout finished. "We've left that question wide open so you can answer it any way you want. And honestly, we've seen some pretty interesting answers."



"Some of you show our mothers and fathers as good, kind people and excellent parents," Ruff went on. "They're kind of the Ward and June Cleaver of the Viking set."

"If they're named after a cleaver, they can't be all bad," Lout interrupted.

"But others take a darker view," Ruff continued. "We've seen our parents shown as disinterested, neglectful, abusive, alcoholic, absentee... pick your dysfunction and one of us has probably had a mother or father who suffers from it, and makes us suffer from it as well. That kind of stinks for us, but all we have to do is switch to another story and things will probably get better."

"Believe me, that's an advantage we have over most of you, and we appreciate it," Hiccup chimed in. "I mean, look at how my dad appeared in the movie, or Lout's dad in "Thawfest"! I'm sure some of you would love to switch to a different set of parents just by clicking a link on a web page."

"It's possible that some of you write bad parents for us, and then show us overcoming that problem, just as a vicarious escape from your own not-so-great parents," Astrid added. "We certainly won't judge you for that."

After a brief pause, a woman in her 30's raised her hand. "I'd like to ask the entire panel what they think of themselves as they appear in the movie franchise, compared to the way you appeared in the books."

"I guess I'll start," Hiccup sighed as he took the mic back from Astrid. "Book or movie, I'm still someone who isn't expected to be a winner in Viking society. In fact, from what I've seen, you wouldn't expect me to be a winner in your society, either. Of course, that's the appeal of the books and the movie and the cartoons as well â€" people like it when the underdog wins."

"Just speaking for me, the movie gave with one hand and took away with the other. The books made me a master swordfighter; the movie took that away. The movie made me a barely-competent smith's assistant, which some of you have taken and turned me into a master weaponsmith or something; that sure wasn't in the book."

"Of course, my real gain in the movie was Toothless, who changed from a whiny, selfish, lazy little git into the most awesome dragon who ever flew, and â€"

"Hey!" all five of the other teens shouted.

"...and also my best friend," he went on. "So if the question is just about me, I couldn't say which is better, book or movie. But if you include Toothless, there's no question, I'd rather be in the movies." He passed the microphone to Astrid.

"I can't really answer that question, because I'm not in the books," she began. "If you treat me as a re-imagining of Camicazi, then I much prefer my movie role. Camicazi had some awesome skills, but her attitude went too far in some directions and not far enough in others. I mean, I could let my hair get all tangled, and paint

Stormfly different colors, and start shouting, 'Boys are stupid!' all the time, and people might think I was Camicazi. But that approach doesn't get you very far once you're into your teens. Yup, I like me the way you see me." That drew a scattering of applause.

"No question, I am totally better off in the movie," Fishlegs exclaimed. "Who would want to be a totally useless, nearsighted, allergic loser whose only claim to fame is that I was an even worse Viking than Hiccup? No offense. Now I've bulked up, I don't need glasses, I'm an expert in at least one field â€œ"

"Geekiness?" someone called from the end of the table.

"Dragon statistics," he replied. "And, best of all, my dragon went from 'hopeless' to 'awesome,' and now I can ride her! So, yeah, I'm much better off now.

"The one thing I had going for me in the books was that I was Hiccup's best friend, and I kind of miss that. But Hiccup's new best friend is a dragon, so I don't feel envious or anything. Besides, can you see Hiccup fighting the Red Death while he was riding on me?" The audience laughed.

It was Snotlout's turn. "I don't do pity parties, so don't think this is one, but when they went from books to movie, I was the big loser. In the books, I was the best young Viking there was, at everything that mattered â€œ Bashyball, Frightening Foreigners, Rudery, Boarding Enemy Ships, Burping, everything! And everybody knew it! I'm still awesome now, but nobody seems to know it, and everybody thinks Astrid is the best. I feel like I've been demoted or something!

"Not only that, but in the books, I was always trying to get rid of Hiccup so I could be the future chief, and whatever I tried, it usually worked, for a few minutes at least. Name one thing I've tried to do since I got animated that has worked the way I wanted it to!"

"You still got the Monstrous Nightmare," Tuff said, "and it's a lot more monstrous than it was in the books."

"Well, yeah, Hookfang is a lot more awesome now," Lout nodded. "But if I'm destined to be nothing but a speed bump on Hiccup's way to the top, can't I still be a cool one, like I used to be?" He rested his chin on his fist and sighed deeply.

Tuffnut accepted the mic from him. "When I was in the books, I might as well not have been. I was just a name that came up now and then, usually because St. Cressida needed somebody to take a fall or something. I had no personality at all. I'm still not a prime-mover for plot lines, but at least I'm a real person now, and I'm glad about that."

Ruff shrugged. "I wasn't in the books, period. They invented me for the movie because they wanted another girl. I'm glad I'm here, but I can't answer the question, sorry. How about if I tell a knock-knock joke instead?"

The moderator reclaimed the microphone. "Yes, you in the third row?"

"Tuffnut was talking earlier about how he didn't want to be the comic relief," the pre-teen girl said. He quickly resumed his Derpy face. "He was just talking about having a personality now, and I'm wondering, what kind of character would you like to be, if you could?"

"Are you asking me for ideas for your next fanfic?" he smirked. "Hmmm. What kind of character would I be if I could? I think, for starters, I'd like to climb walls and spin webs out of my wrists, then rescue a rich girl from a huge ship that hit an iceberg and sank, then learn to use the Force and fight a Sith Lord with a lightsaber, and finish up with some Irish step-dancing." The audience was laughing nervously, not sure if he was joking or not.

"Seriously, I like who I am. I'd just like a bigger slice of the action. I'd like to be the one who has the great idea that solves the big problem, or who catches the bad guy in the act, or gives the moral lecture at the end of the CN episode."

"Sorry, Tuff, you can't have that one," Hiccup called from the other end of the table. "That's in my contract."

"That figures," Tuffnut grumbled. "Well, you can't kill a guy for asking. And if one of you authors could send a set of OC twins to Berk, a girl for me and a guy for my sister, that would be totally awesome. That's just in case you did want some ideas for your next fanfic."

"Knock knock," said Ruffnut.

"Maybe we can get to that later," the moderator interrupted. "Yes, over there?"

One of the few boys in the audience stood up. "Hiccup, why do you let Astrid initiate all the kissing? Why don't you kiss her now and then?"

"Uhhh... because it's safer that way?" Hiccup quavered. "Seriously, it doesn't matter that much who starts it, or even who finishes it. It's the middle that matters, and... I've got no complaints."

"Good answer," purred Astrid, whose fist had been cocked and ready.

"But don't you ever want to be the man and make the first move?" the boy asked.

"Considering how Vikings weren't supposed to kiss at all before they got married, I don't think I have anything to complain about," Hiccup replied. "But, if and when we get married, things will be different after that. I'm going to be the man of my house, and I have her permission to say so."

"Knock knock," said Ruffnut.

The moderator tried again. "I think I see another â€"

"Knock knock," Ruffnut repeated.

"Fine, let's get this over with," Snotlout groaned. "Who's there?"

"Atch."

"Atch who?"

"Gesundheit!" Ruff answered, and burst out giggling. Her brother joined in after a few moments, but he looked like he didn't get it. The rest of the teens did facepalms. Dozens of cell phones and iPads snapped pictures of them in that pose.

The moderator called on the girl she'd tried to call on earlier. "Snotlout, when are you going to realize, Astrid just isn't that into you?"

Snotlout looked stricken for a moment, but regained his composure. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said firmly. "Everybody knows Astrid is strong-willed and a little stubborn, so I don't expect her to fall into my arms on the first try, or even the second."

"Or the forty-third?" the questioner asked.

"Have you been counting?" Lout challenged her. "I figure, eventually you authors are going to get tired of the same old Hiccstrid, and you'll want to write something different, and that will be my big chance! Once she sees me for who I really am, I know she'll never want to leave me again."

"But you'd consider an OC girl while you're waiting?" the girl continued.

"Sure, why not? My awesomeness is a renewable resource. There's plenty of me to keep a whole shipload of OC girls happy, and still save the good stuff for my dream girl when she bows to the inevitable. That's me."

"You say that while she's talking marriage with Hiccup," the girl persisted.

"Well, yeah, I know that's what they're talking about, but talk is cheap," he said, not quite so confidently. "But, just to be on the safe side, could you authors get that ship full of OC girls headed for Berk soon? It's not that I'm worried; I just don't want to keep them waiting."

"Good answer," nodded the moderator. "Yes, young lady over there?"

## 5. Chapter 5

### **\*\*Panel Discussion\*\*** Chapter 5

A college-aged girl rose. "Seeing how the six of you aren't from around here, I was wondering... are there any questions you have for us, so you could understand our stories better?"

"Boy, do we ever!"

>"Hand me that microphone!"<br>"You've got some explaining to do!"

"That sounds like a 'yes'," smiled the moderator. "We'll start with Hiccup."

"Okay, in addition to the stuff I've already mentioned, there's one other thing I really don't get," Hiccup said. "Deathfics. I mean, it's obvious that you like us, so... why do you want to kill us?"

An author in the third row raised her hand. "It's not that we want to kill you," she began. "It's that we want to explore how your friends react to your being gone. It's certainly not an entertaining thing, if that's what you're worried about."

"Well, it is reassuring to know that reducing my friends to tears, depression, and grief isn't something you enjoy," Hiccup nodded, "but it seems like an odd thing to pour your time and effort into. Is it a sign that you're all out of happy ideas for us?"

"No, it just means we want to try something different," the teen author explained. "It's a progression thing. Most of us got our start with fluffy self-insertions, then moved up into more serious stories that kept the happy ending, and now we want to see if we can write something dark and still do it well."

"So it's not about fun and entertainment â€" it's a kind of mental self-gratification?" Hiccup looked puzzled. "I'm still not sure I get it."

"I know Snotlout struggles with anything mental, but I bet he could tell you all about the self-gratification part," Astrid smirked.

"ZING!" shouted Tuff. Ruff tried to hide her laughter behind her hands, as did many in the audience. Snotlout leaned over and nudged Fishlegs. "Did she just insult me?" he whispered. Fishlegs looked the other way and pretended he didn't hear the question.

Hiccup gave up and handed the microphone to Astrid. "I've got one that I'd like you all to explain to me," she said. "Gender swaps. What could possibly be the point of turning Hiccup into a girl?"

"And please leave the me-and-Toothless angle out of it, I'm begging you!" Hiccup pleaded.

"I think there are several reasons we do that," a tween-age girl in the front row said. "For one thing, we want to write romances for Hiccup, but there aren't enough girls in your town to give us any variety, so we make him a girl to open up our possibilities."

"I'm not sure Dagur the Deranged is a possibility I'd want opened up," Hiccup murmured, and shivered.

Another girl near her raised her hand. "Also, most of us are girls, so we're better at writing girls' emotions than guys' emotions. We want Hiccup to be the star of our stories, so we make him a 'her' so we can do a better job of writing how he â€" I mean she would react to different situations."

"Wait a minute," Ruff interrupted. "I thought the point of your whole feminist thing was that there aren't any real differences between guys and girls."

"Welll-l-l... that's in our world," the first girl answered hesitantly. "In your world, everybody thought there were lots of differences."

"That's true," Snotlout commented, "and I, for one, am glad for those differences! You guys don't know what you're missing!"

"If you're talking about girls, you're the one who doesn't know what he's missing!" Tuff grinned. Another round of nervous laughter made its way around the room.

"Why is everybody always picking on me?" Lout was almost whimpering.

It was Fishlegs' turn with the mic. "There's something that really confuses me about some of your stories. AU's. That stands for Awful Universes, right?"

"Actually, Fishlegs, it stands for Alternate Universes," the moderator corrected him gently.

"Either way, it's weird," he went on. "Especially those prisons you keep putting us in."

The audience members looked at one another in confusion. They all knew of one or two stories where Hiccup had landed in a 21st-century jail, but that didn't sound like what Fishlegs was talking about. He tried to explain.

"You know, those big brick buildings with windows that don't open? Where they stick us in rooms with a bunch of other young people who don't like us, and make us listen to adults droning on and on about stuff that has nothing to do with real life? Then they make us play games we're bad at, and deal with cliques we don't belong to... it's really strange and awful!"

After some more head-shaking, one of the girls near the back spoke up. "I think he's talking about high school."

"Yeah, that's it!" Fishlegs burst out. "I saw that phrase a couple of times, but it didn't mean anything to me. I've been trying to teach Meatlug to carry me a mile up above the earth, and that's all the 'high' schooling I know about! So... what's the deal?"

"For most of us, that's the environment we know best," a girl on the left said. "We put you there, to see how characters like you would react in a totally different time and place than what you're used to, but with your personalities intact."

"So it's another way of stretching your abilities as a writer?" Fishlegs asked.

"Yeah, kind of like that," the girl nodded.

"Or is it a way for some writers to hide their failings, by writing

about something familiar instead of about something they'd have to do research on?" Astrid asked pointedly. No one answered. The room got very quiet.

"No need to get personal," said someone near the back.

"You people have written bedroom scenes for me and Hiccup, and now you think I'm getting personal?" Astrid retorted.

"Let's try and keep this friendly, if we can," the moderator said nervously. "Snotlout, is there a question you have for us?"

He took the mic firmly. "I just want to know, how come everybody writes for the characters in the movie, and nobody writes for the characters in the book? It's not just about me being more awesome in the books â€" well, yeah, that's an angle you should cover, but there's more. There were a bunch of people who never appeared in the movie, but who were pretty cool and worth writing about â€" Camicazi, Dogsbreath, Old Wrinkly, Thuggory... there were different islands and different tribes, there were dozens of different kinds of dragons... so what's the deal?"

No one responded. "Does anyone want to try and answer that?" the moderator asked.

A young girl hesitantly raised her hand. "Maybe it's because we don't know the book characters that well?"

"I'm curious," Snotlout said. "How many of you have read all the books at least twice?" A scattering of hands went up all over the room. "How many of you have seen the movie at least twenty times?" All hands went up. "There's part of the answer right there."

The moderator raised her hand. "Part of it is that, if we write for the books, we lose Astrid and Ruffnut completely, Tuffnut becomes a nobody, and you become someone really nasty and unpleasant."

"And the dragons!" added a boy in the third row. "There were lots more dragons in the books, but they were either monstrously huge, or way too small. Riding on dragons is the coolest thing ever â€" it says so on tvtropes dot com â€" and there wasn't enough of that in the books."

"Especially Toothless," said a girl in the front row. "In the movie, he's brave, loyal, smart, cute, and totally awesome. In the books, he's just a selfish Terrible Terror who stutters. The Hiccup-Toothless relationship is one of our favorite subjects, and in the books, that relationship is mostly frustration on Hiccup's part. There isn't much to write about."

"That didn't stop St. Cressida," Fishlegs chimed in.

"Most of us aren't Cressida Cowell, and we know it," the girl in the front row said. "We do this just for fun, and the movie universe seems like a much more fun place to be." Many others nodded at that.

"We've got a question!" Ruff and Tuff chorused. Ruffnut took the microphone, Tuffnut tried to take it from her, and they got into a shoving match over it. They were about to knock over the table when

Snotlout got up and bopped both of them on the helmets, one with each fist. "Oh, yeah, sorry," they chorused again. A quick rock-paper-scissors later, Tuff got the mic.

"In the movie, Hiccup was this total weakling apprentice who needed both arms to hold a sword so he could sharpen it," he began. "So how come, in your stories, he's this master weapon smith who makes excellent swords, and Astrid's axe, and all this other dangerous, heavy stuff?"

Hands went up all over the room. The moderator picked someone at random. "That's an easy one, actually," the girl said. "We can tell by the workmanship Hiccup did on Toothless' tail that he's a good smith. It just takes him longer because he's so weak." Hiccup winced.

"He did good work on his bola-throwing machine, too," someone else called out. "It worked perfectly â€" once he got it out on the battlefield, that is."

"Minor calibration issue!" thirty people said at once. Hiccup winced again.

"I think we've embarrassed Hiccup enough," the moderator suggested; he heaved a sigh of relief. "Our time is starting to run short. Does anyone else have a question for our panel?"

## 6. Chapter 6

**\*\*Panel Discussion\*\*** Chapter 6

A/N Thanks to Steefwaterbutter, Poopster5000, and coltjolt for asking (or inspiring) the questions used in this chapter.

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A younger girl raised her hand. "How do you feel about the Big Four?"

Hiccup took the mic. "You mean, the Rise of the Brave Tangled Dragons? I'm sure my opinion won't sit well with a lot of you, but I don't like the idea. In fact, I really dislike the idea. Well, to be honest, I hate the idea."

"Tell us how you really feel!" Tuffnut shouted from the other end of the table.

"I mean, think about it, people!" Hiccup went on. "On the HTTYD side, a lot of the whole Big Four thing boils down to finding a partner for me. So who are you going to choose?"

"You've got Merida. Warrior princess. Feisty. Strong-willed. Kind of pretty. She comes from a culture similar to mine.

"You've got Rapunzel. Princess. Feisty. Not a real warrior, but she's dangerous with a frying pan. Huge, gorgeous eyes. Even without the hair, she's one of the prettiest â€" OW! Astrid, I was speaking hypothetically!"



"And I just punched your arm hypothetically," she said sweetly. "Please go on. I'm dying to hear how you talk your way out of this one."

"So anyway," he continued, "you've got two wonderful ladies to pair me with â€" assuming I need to be paired with either of them," he added with a nervous glance at Astrid. "Either one could be a good match for me, depending on how you wrote it. But I guess you authors can't make up your minds between the two of them. So whom do I get paired off with, more often than not?"

"Jack Frost!"

He shook his head vigorously with his tongue out, making a "blabbala-blabbala-blabbala" noise. "I mean, I've got nothing against the guy. We've met a couple of times at animation conventions, and we've talked a little â€" he's a nice guy. I wish him well in everything he does, except being my love interest. Even if I did swing that way â€" seriously, people, think! This is Jack Frost we're talking about! He makes snow and ice for people!

"Now, everyone, say it with me. 'This is Berk'." Everyone in the room had no problem reciting the familiar lines with him â€" "It's twelve days north of Hopeless and a few degrees south of Freezing to Death. It's located solidly on the Meridian of Misery." He nodded and went on. "Okay, so you all know how I feel about Berk's climate. Most Vikings feel the same way.

"So what do you think will happen if I walk into town and say, 'Hi, everybody, this is my new friend Jack. He's going to make snow and ice for us'? What will happen? I'll tell you what'll happen! They'll ship me off to the Outcasts, and they'll stick a sign on his back that says, 'Extremely dangerous, kill on sight!'

"The bottom line is, no matter which one you pair me with, I suffer, either from Astrid or from the rest of the village. It's a bad idea from every angle I can see." He passed the microphone back to the moderator before anyone else could offer an opinion. The mod called on a middle-aged woman in the middle row.

"Speaking of that, I'd like to hear Astrid's thoughts on something. Of all the people we've paired Hiccup off with, which one do you see as the biggest threat?"

"All of them," Astrid called, even before the microphone made it down to her.

"But there must be one or two that concern you more than the others," the questioner persisted.

"Well, let's see." Astrid looked thoughtful. "Toothcup doesn't bother me, even though it's gross, because it'll never happen. Some of those slash stories... well, they might raise my curiosity just a little teeny-tiny bit, but there again, they're never going to happen. Oh, stop blushing, Hiccup! Anyway, that leaves the girls.

"Ruffnut... no, I'm not worried about her. Even if she was that much of a backstabbing witch â€" and I mean that in a nice way, Ruff â€" the two of them could never get along for very long. They're too different. The same with Heather, although there's a lot we don't

know about that particular backstabbing witch. Depending on how you portray her, the two of them could make a cute couple, which is why I trust her as far as I can throw her. Some day, I'd love to find out how far that is..." Her face took on a dreamy expression for a moment; then her thoughts came back to the question she was answering.

"The OC girls bother me sometimes, because you authors either make them into the perfect girl for him, or change him so he thinks they're perfect. Either way, that's hard to compete against. Nobody could be that perfect! Personally, I think you authors are keeping secrets from us. I bet all those gorgeous OC girls snore, and get PMS, and break wind under the covers, and have all kinds of antisocial habits that the stories never tell us about. Are you paying attention, Hiccup?"

"No! I mean yes," he nodded quickly. "I mean, I'm sure you're right."

"What about Rapunzel and Merida, from the previous question?" Fishlegs wondered.

Astrid scowled. "Either of those two could be a real threat to me. They're both strong and â€" sorry, I have to say it â€" brave; they're both pretty; they're both handy with their chosen weapon, whether it's a bow and arrow or a frying pan; so they're both a lot like me, and they could take my place if you're a good enough writer. I think Rapunzel scares me more than Merida because she has a soft, girly side, and it's easy to imagine Hiccup's head being turned by that. Still, I don't think I can trust a single one of them."

"So, what's the bottom line for you?" the woman asked.

"The bottom line," Astrid said, "is that, if I'd been in the tavern scene in Tangled, that song would have had an extra verse. Like this." She jumped onto the table, and background music began playing from somewhere. She strutted up and down the length of the table as she sang, with the other five echoing her raggedly on the chorus:

"With my axe, I am a master.

>"Stormfly loves to fly me faster.<br>"If it's good looks that you want, I can deliver.

>"But as long as I'm alive, I'll<br>"Know the way to treat a rival.

>"I'd like to push that Heather in the river.<p>

"I'd strand Merida alone on Dragon Island.

>"Would Zipplebacks and Gronckles make her scream?<br>"And Rapunzel should get sick-up

>"If it keeps her from my Hiccup.<br>"You writers need to know I've got a dream."

"I've got a dream! ("She's got a dream!") I've got a dream! ("She's got a dream!")

>"Am I jealous? Just a little, not extreme.<br>"I'd put all those OC ladies

>"On a one-way ship to Hades,<br>"And Hiccup would be mine! I've got a dream!"

She bowed gracefully to the cheers and applause, and returned to her seat.

Someone called out, "Hades is Greek! Shouldn't that be Hel?"

"Hel didn't rhyme," she shrugged.

"You, in the back row, with the glasses," the moderator called. "Is your hand raised?"

"Yes, I have a question for Hiccup. Why do you call Toothless' fire a 'plasma blast' when the concept of plasma wasn't discovered until 1879, and the word 'plasma' wasn't invented until 1928?"

Hiccup heaved a sigh of relief. 'At last, a question that isn't personal! Actually, that's a common misconception. You're forgetting that the word 'plasma' as you're using it is an English word, and my friends and I don't speak English at home. In Old Norse, the word 'plasma' means 'scary fireball from a scary dragon.' It has nothing to do with the ionization of a gas into an electrically neutral medium forming a fourth state of matter, with electromagnetic qualities distinct from solids, liquids, or gases. Does that answer your question?"

The girl hugged herself in giddy delight. "He's a science geek, just like me! I think I'm going to faint!" The girls on either side of her held her up.

The moderator looked at her watch. "We're running low on time; we'll take one more question. Yes, over there?"

"I've got a question for all of you," the girl with blue streaks in her hair said. "If you had written the script for the next movie, what kinds of things would you have wanted to see in it?"

"Hmmm," they all said at once. They passed the microphone down until Ruff got it and began speaking.

"I'd like to see my brother and me get a little more screen time," she said. "It's not an ego thing; it's okay if we aren't the heroes, or if we don't find true love. But the animators put a lot of work into getting us to look and move right, especially our hair, and it would only be fair if they get to see the fruits of their labors on the screen more."

"Hey, who are you calling a fruit?" her brother demanded. She shrugged and handed him the mic.

"Me, I want to see a lot more dragon fire!" he exclaimed. "Obviously, our Zippleback would be at the top of my list, but I'm not totally picky about it. I mean, we ride dragons, right? Dragons breathe fire, right? So how come we see so little of that? Toothless gets to take a lot of shots because he's the star, but what about all those other awesome dragons? Aside from the raid at the start of the movie, and a few quick shots in the dragon-training ring, we might as well be riding pegasus-ponies from My Little Pony, for all the fire they breathe. More fire!"

"You know, that's the second time you've mentioned My Little Pony since we started this thing," Ruff commented. "Are you turning into a

brony or something?"

"Nay," he smirked, and passed the mic to Snotlout.

"I know what I'd want to see," he said with a predatory grin. "I want to see me doing what Snotlout does in the books â€" trying to get rid of Hiccup and take over the tribe. I'm not saying I should succeed at it; I know the fan base would freak out if anything happened to their precious Hiccup; but my name is Snotlout, not Doormat. It could be a great subplot, and the interwoven subplots were one of the things that made the first movie special. And, of course, I'd like to make a few more passes at Astrid. After all, I only have to win once." He winked at her as he handed the mic to Fishlegs.

"That's an easy one," the big boy said firmly. "I want more different kinds of dragons! The first movie gave us the Night Fury, the Gronckle, the Zippleback, the Nadder, and the Monstrous Nightmare. Oh, yeah, and the Terrible Terror that was mostly a joke. But there are so many more than that! The CN series gave us the Scauldron, the Changewing, the Thunderdrum, the Typhoomerang, the Smothering Smokebreath, and the Whispering Death, and that was just the first season! The second season has given us more, the Book of Dragons has a few we haven't encountered yet, one or two others have shown up in video games, and that doesn't even mention the dozens of dragons that Saint Cressida has described. So it's not like they're all out of ideas. Give us more dragons to learn about!"

"You forgot the Red Death," Astrid chimed in.

"Oops." Fishlegs looked embarrassed; the crowd giggled a bit.

Astrid took the microphone. "As for me, I'd like to see more character development and relationship development on the screen. I'd like people to see how two girls who are very different from each other, like me and Ruff, will become friends just because we're the only girls our age in town. I'd like to see the twins have a sweet brother-and-sister moment together." Ruff and Tuff made gagging noises. She went on, "I'd also like to see more development of our dragon-and-rider relationships. We all relate differently to our chosen dragons, and that could be really interesting for people to see."

"What about you and Hiccup?" someone in the back called out.

"I don't want to see that on the screen," she said firmly. "We'll work that out when the cameras aren't rolling, thank you very much."

"But that would be even more interesting for people to see!" the person persisted. Many others nodded.

"What a bunch of voyeurs you are!" she exclaimed. "Paparazzi with words! Since when did romance become a spectator sport?"

"Since you went into the movies," a girl in the front row chimed in. "You're movie stars! You're public figures now! Do you really think you can have private moments when you're out in public?"

"Can I answer that?" Hiccup asked.

"Gladly," Astrid snapped, "but watch what you say." He took the mic hesitantly.

"We've tried to cover this before, so I'll explain it a different way," he began. "You're right about us being public figures. If no one liked the movie, we'd be forgotten, this convention never would have happened, and Astrid and I could do ice-dancing moves around the town square, with costumes to match, and nobody would care. We owe our popularity to people like you. We understand that you're curious about us, that most of you want her and me to be happy together, and you want to keep an eye on us to make sure it happens that way.

"Just ask yourselves: if you were starting your first serious relationship with somebody, would you want a few hundred of your friends following you around, watching your every move, listening to every private word you say, and preparing to write a story about how you could have done it better? Trust me â€" it can be kind of nerve-wracking. I know you'd love to see her and me do all kinds of romantic stuff together in the next movie. I'm not allowed to say if you will or you won't see that kind of stuff; we all had to sign a non-disclosure agreement with Dreamworks, or they wouldn't hire us. But the question was, 'What do we want to see in the next movie,' and we don't want to see our entire private life put on public display." He took a deep breath. "How was that, Astrid?"

"Nicely done," she smiled, and blew him a kiss. The crowd cheered; he turned red.

"As for what I'd like to see in the next movie," he began.

Snotlout cut him off. "You'd like to see Astrid grow a bigger pair of â€" " He never finished; Astrid brandished her axe with an expression that shouted "death," and he jumped out of his seat and cowered behind Fishlegs.

Hiccup sighed. "I guess a Lout's gotta be a Lout. Anyway, I agree with Astrid about more dragon-and-rider moments, and I agree with Fishlegs about more dragons, because people love that stuff. Believe it or not, I also agree with Snotlout about him trying to get rid of me. I think that would make the movie interesting. And, in spite of everything I've said, it would probably be good for the movie â€" not for us, but for the movie â€" if Astrid and I had a little bit of romance on-screen."

"Whose side are you on?" Astrid demanded over her shoulder. She was still trying to figure out a way to get around Fishlegs so she could bisect Snotlout.

"I'm on our fans' side," Hiccup answered mildly. "I'd want the next movie to be as awesome as the first one, so people will keep coming back for more, and our fan base will grow." He started to continue, but had to stop due to the cheers and applause from the audience. A couple of them stood up to clap, then others joined them, until they were giving him a standing ovation. He turned beet-red and stared at the table.

He finally mumbled, "You guys are the best fans ever," and gave the microphone back to the moderator.

The mod looked at her watch. "I'm afraid we're out of time, and we promised the organizers we'd be done in time for the Dragon Roar-Alike Contest. We've got a few seminars scheduled for the side rooms, if you'd like to meet a few of Berk's less famous citizens, up close and personal. Seating is limited, so if you didn't sign up for a seminar when you pre-registered for this convention, you may not be able to find a seat."

"Will Hiccup and the others be signing autographs?" someone called from the middle of the group.

"I'm sorry, but no," said the moderator. "The convention organizers were afraid that, if we tried something like that, it would turn into a mob scene. Let's be thankful for the time they were able to give us. Now let's give a big hand to the dragon-riders of Berk!" The "Test Drive" music blared again, the fans all stood and clapped, and Hiccup made his way toward the door.

Then he stopped.

He looked over his shoulder at all the fans. He squared his shoulders, turned, took a deep breath, and walked back toward them.

"Oh, no, you don't!" Astrid was at his side in a moment. "I know what you're thinking, and you can just forget it!"

"Astrid, some of those girls traveled for hours to get here! How can we just walk away without even saying goodbye?"

"Hiccup, you are not wading into that pack of crazed fangirls all by yourself!" she said flatly. "They'll tear you to pieces, and grab all your clothes for souvenirs! I'm going with you." They linked arms and approached the fans together. The fans saw them coming, left their seats en masse, and rushed to meet them halfway, and the convention got its mob scene after all.

Snotlout vaulted over the table, exclaiming, "I want some of that fangirl action!" Fishlegs took the long way around the table, saying, "I just want to make some new friends!" The twins were right behind him, plotting their tactics if a brawl broke out. But there was no violence, just many, many heartfelt hugs. By the time Hiccup finally broke away from the group, he was wondering if he would need some metal ribs to go along with his metal leg. Astrid was shocked to see huge bruises on his cheek, but they turned out to be nothing but multiple shades of lipstick.

The Dragon Roar-Alike Contest had to be cut short, due to lack of time. No one seemed to mind. Even the upcoming seminars, which promised to be quite interesting and entertaining, paled in comparison to that unexpected chance to meet Hiccup and the others, up close and very personal. For years afterward, those who were lucky enough to attend that convention were considered the alpha geeks of the HTTYD fandom, and the convention itself was spoken of almost reverently â€

"This was our convention.

"Like most conventions, it was full of people who were considered a bit off-center by the rest of the world. We're okay with that. We

like being different; most of us have always been that way. The real difference was the topic. While most conventions are about ponies or Pok  mon, ours was about...

"Dragons!"

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\_A/N Technically, this is the end of the convention. But I've got a few ideas for the seminars, so the story itself is not over yet.\_

End  
file.